

Voyageurs National Park

Contributed by Administrator
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Set along the border lakes between Minnesota and Canada, VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK is like no other in the US national park system. To see it properly, or indeed to grasp its immense beauty at all, you need to leave your car behind and venture into the wild by boat. Once out on the lakes, you're in a great, silent world. Kingfishers, osprey and eagles swoop down for their share of the abundant walleye. Moose and bear stalk the banks. Sunrises and sunsets inspire poets and photographers. The park's name comes from the intrepid eighteenth-century French-Canadian trappers, who needed almost a year to get their pelts back to Montréal in primitive birchbark canoes. They paddled for sixteen hours a day, fighting off attacks from Native Americans - and each other. Their "customary waterway" became so established that the treaty of 1783 ending the American Revolution specified it as the international border. You can't do Voyageurs justice on a day trip, though daily cruises from Rainy Lake visitor center, ten miles east of International Falls, do at least allow a peek at the lake country (late May to early Sept; \$35 or more for a range of special tours;). If you're here for a few days, rent a boat (reckon on \$40 a day) and camp out. It's easy to get lost in this maze of islands and rocky outcrops, and unseen sandbanks lurk beneath the surface. If you're at all unsure, hire a guide from one of the resorts for the first day (around \$200 per 8hr day). During freeze-up - usually from December until March - the park takes on a whole new aura, as a prime destination for skiers and snowmobilers (rentals from \$120 per day). INTERNATIONAL FALLS, the only sizable nearby community, might sound attractive, but it's a messy array of motels, duty-free shops, fast-food joints and lumber yards; the falls, never more than glorified rapids anyway, were dammed in 1906.